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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the Northridge campus of California State University incorporated academic program assessment into its regular practices using opinion leaders, diffusion methods, and collaboration between faculty and administration. Elements of the assessment program included: (1) appointment of an assessment coordinator; (2) high priority given to assessment; (3) periodic visits with academic deans; (4) assessment discussions involving various constituencies in the University; (5) revision of the program review process to include assessment findings; (6) program implementation which creates a need for assessment information; (7) an assessment policy; (8) high status given to assessment by governance; (9) faculty incentives for assessment; (10) incorporation of assessment in important faculty initiatives; (11) incorporation of assessment in administrative initiatives; (12) use of outside experts to share assessment information with campus communities; and (13) serendipitous internal and external forces for assessment. (MAH)

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Assessment and the Culture of Evidence It Provides for the University's Internal and External Publics: A University Administrator's Viewpoint

A paper prepared for the eighty-first meeting
of
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The purpose of assessment is to facilitate the highest quality educational experience for our students through the systematic collection and interpretation of student/alumni outcomes at defining points through their university experience: at entrance, at the completion of General Education, at the beginning and/or completion of their majors, and after graduation. In order to develop a culture of evidence in the university about the effects of the teaching/learning process, the university must have clearly articulated, shared goals and objectives about the nature of the educational process, and be engaged in the assessment of student outcomes to determine if those goals and objectives have been realized. The assessing university continually asks the following questions:

- Have we clearly articulated goals and objectives for student outcomes in our mission statement?
- How effective are we in assisting students to achieve those goals and objectives?
- What outcomes (values, knowledge, skills, and competencies) are students achieving from their education?
- How does the university use assessment data to improve the quality of the programs that it offers?
- How and with whom does the university share assessment information to guide its vision and direction?
- How does the university share assessment information with its external constituencies?

Learning is an interactive process between faculty members and students. Because of the inextricable linkage of teaching to the learning process, faculty must assume responsibility to assess if the student outcomes agreed upon by the university, academic schools and departments have been met through the curriculum and pedagogy. The faculty are responsible for assessment of the programs. (Fieweger). In these words, I have provided the statement about assessment that academic administrators have agreed to include in the Academic Plan (1995). We did not arrive at this statement separate from the faculty.

Adding assessment to the teaching/learning responsibilities of the faculty at a time when they have not had adequate pay raises and are beleaguered in institution chaos (with or without an earthquake) is not easily achieved. This paper will discuss strategies used at one large urban

comprehensive university to engage faculty and administration in the assessment process.

INTRODUCING ASSESSMENT

Five years ago, I arrived at the university to greet a returning contingent from an American Association of Higher Education meeting which was devoted to assessment. My predecessor in the position of Associate Vice President of Academic Programs had wisely selected "opinion leaders" from each of the eight academic schools to attend the conference. New to the university, I decided that the best way to get to know them, as well as to set the agenda for assessment for Academic Affairs, would be to sponsor an evening for them to share with the university community their ideas about assessment.

The "opinion leaders" represented every view on the continuum of agreement to disagreement about the value of assessment. One presented it as a governmental plot to control higher education and rebut academic freedom; another described it as flaky - something the faculty would never buy into; and still another insisted that university faculty members who wanted to ensure their jobs in the "downsizing" of higher education could use assessment data to create a culture of evidence for internal and external constituencies that the university was doing its job and share the assessment data as proof for that claim. Finally, one speaker insisted that faculty know what they teach, but have very little information about what students learn. A lively discussion followed about the difference between grading and assessment. Reinforcing the positive aspects of assessment while reducing the negative aspects became a major part of my work from that meeting forward.

Now I can share a more descriptive subtitle for this paper: **ADVANCING AN ASSESSMENT AGENDA IN THE UNIVERSITY: Changing the "A" word into the "Ah" Word.**

At that first university assessment meeting, faculty interested in pursuing the concept identified themselves and, under the direction of one of the AAHE contingent and patterned after the Harvard University Assessment Program, formed an Assessment Dinner Group. The Group pursued issues of definition, application and funding for assessment projects during the first year of its existence. The faculty, staff and administrators attending the monthly assessment dinner meetings created an institutional focus on assessment, but without any significant budget

incentives or administrative mandate for the university to develop assessment policies or practices they could do little more than catalog assessment projects across the university and set the agenda for more to come.

Some in the group had participated in training in classroom research (K. P. Cross and T. A. Angelo). Those members had looked at their own classroom and asked the question, "How do I know that the students are learning what I think I'm teaching them?" Faculty from a wide range of disciplines sought answers to that question using and adapting many of the classroom research strategies shared by Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross in their book, CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES: A HANDBOOK FOR FACULTY. As a follow-up to the training, brown-bag lunches were scheduled monthly so that faculty could share the results of using classroom research techniques with others. These lunches allowed faculty to openly discuss problems encountered in pedagogy and became a clearing house for ideas on how to use the results of classroom research to affect what and how faculty taught. Over 150 faculty members were on the mailing list for these brown bag lunches and each meeting created a lively discussion on pedagogy for the 30-40 faculty members who attended.

Members committed to the Classroom Research found great support for their experimentation with student feedback by introducing the one minute paper, invented dialog, and punctuated lectures. My office, Undergraduate Studies, provided the staffing required to contact the faculty, some refreshments, a time and a place for the meeting, and supported the Director of Instructional Development who organized each luncheon meeting and gave faculty some alternative approaches in pedagogy and assessment. This faculty-to-faculty program improved teaching and learning at the university and provided instructional development in classroom assessment.

Shortly after the Assessment Dinner Group began, the Regional Accreditation team made its tenth year visit to the campus. As a result of the visit, the campus received the following statement from the visiting team:

> **....(the university) has made very little progress toward systematic assessment of learning in its academic programs. Despite scattered initiatives and increasing widespread discussion, . . . (the university) does not have campus policies on**

outcomes assessment, institutional research studies to evaluate the performance of students in various academic programs, or illustrative assessment programs that can serve as models for academic units throughout the university. (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 1991)

Those faculty who participated in the classroom research lunches questioned the lack of recognition made by the visiting team of their collaborative work. However, the Dinner Group was well aware of the differences between classroom research that focuses upon one class meeting and student outcomes assessment of academic programs. For the rest of that academic year, the Dinner Group worked on a document to describe to faculty, staff, administration and students, the differences between classroom research, assessment of programs through program review, measuring student outcomes with qualitative and quantitative data and accreditation of the university. Once the distinctions were made about the differences between these separate processes, the Dinner Group set its agenda. Without extensive funding, it could find out what student outcomes assessment were currently being done in the university, see that assessment becomes an integral part of the program review process which was being revised, and develop a policy about assessment. In order to publicize the work of the Dinner Group and discover what assessment projects were in place in the university, the Dinner Group targeted specific departments and invited them to informally discuss what they were doing in assessment.

REQUIRING AND SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT

The pressures to increase assessment have come from both internal and external sources. The strongest external source is the "midterm" response that the campus is making to the WASC report. Discipline based accrediting agencies require assessment of the programs they review. Within the last month, visitation teams from the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology have requested assessment data. The California State University is requiring its 23 campuses to adopt assessment policies.

Outlined below is the blueprint that our campus has used to increase the use of assessment of academic programs. Both faculty and administration have collaborated in implementing these efforts.

1. **Appointment of a Coordinator of Assessment:** The strongest proponent from the

Dinner Group for assessment was a faculty member from the Health Science Department. This faculty member has been elected into the Educational Policies Committee by the Faculty Senate and later "at large" by the entire faculty. She is an "opinion leader" in governance and clearly articulates the position of faculty's rights and responsibilities for curriculum and assessment. By appointing her the Coordinator of Assessment, the Provost selected a credible, dedicated worker who could carry the message about program assessment to internal constituencies.

2. **Using Existing Practices to Create a Priority for Assessment:** Each year Academic Affairs sponsors pedagogical grants of $4,000 to $5,000. Faculty apply for these funds in order to improve their teaching. One of the first things accomplished by the Dinner Group was creating a grant priority for program and courses assessment. By placing that priority on the grants, more faculty applicants incorporated ideas about course and program assessment in their applications. Those that received funding became a catalyst for assessment within their respective departments and schools.

3. **Periodic Visits with Academic Deans:** The Coordinator of Assessment and I have made yearly visits with the deans to converse about the program assessment. In our initial visits, we were able to inform the Deans about assessment programs within their schools, prepare them for the development of the assessment policy and seek names of faculty experts in assessment. More recently our visits have focused upon the directions in assessment each school is taking and how the Coordinator can assist departments in their efforts.

4. **Engage in Assessment With Other Constituencies in the University**: From the early days of the Dinner Group, administrators and staff from Student Affairs joined in assessment discussion. Currently, the Coordinator of Assessment is assisting Counselling Services to develop a Campus Climate Survey and the Alumni Director to develop an Alumni Survey in which we will be able to determine some academic student outcomes. Both of these surveys have been funded through external grants to the university. The Coordinator is leading efforts to assess the effects of the Technology Now Program, a program introducing all new students to word processing, internet and Email, and the Course Web Pages introduced by faculty during Fall Semester 1995.

5. **Revision of the Program Review Process To Include Assessment Findings:**

When the Program Review Process was being studied by an ad hoc group of faculty and one administrator, I requested that a few members of the Assessment . Group be appointed to the Committee. The Provost agreed and the rest, as they say, is history! The faculty created Program Review has become the process in which the department faculty would share the results of assessment of student outcomes and how they have used those results to improve their curricular and co-curricular efforts.

6. **Create a Need for Assessment Information through Program Implementation:** Academic Affairs implemented a Student Success Program for all First Time Freshmen two years ago. The advisement/enrollment program limits FTF to courses in which they could be successful. Because advisement on the campus is decentralized and changes had to be made in how advisors helped students with class choices, assessment data about the previous years FTF class was developed and shared. Once the advisors saw which students, based on testing data, were successful in which courses, and that success (a passing GPA) was directly related to the completion of developmental courses in writing and math as well as the completion of Basic Subjects: GE Writing, GE Math, Critical Reasoning and Oral Communication, they were more willing to change their advisement approaches. In two years, percentage of FTF who needed developmental writing and were placed in it rose from 58% to 90%. The percentage of FTF who needed developmental writing and were placed in it rose from 37% to 70%. We analyzed why the math placement was lower than writing and discovered that FTF did no complete the placement testing for math as readily as they did for writing. Now we have early testing programs in place, including on-site testing in feeder high schools. We have also created a need for assessment data about the Student Success Program by the Associate Deans, Advisors, Department Chairs, and faculty who teach these students. The Coordinator of Assessment works with the Director of Institutional Research to supply the data need to assess the program.

7. **Creation of An Assessment Policy:** Although the Dinner Group members realized that the university needed an Assessment Policy, they wisely decided that timing was very important for implementing one. The Dinner Group reviewed policies from other universities and colleges. After the President of the University returned from one of the system-wide executive meetings, she called for a development of an assessment policy. Within three weeks,

the Coordinator with the help of the Group, had a draft of an assessment policy prepared for the Educational Policies Committee. The policy explained the purposes assessment (accountability and improvement of teaching and learning), indicated that all programs would begin reporting assessment data in their Program Reviews within the next five years. The departments were required to appoint assessment liaisons to work with the Coordinator of assessment. The Educational Policies Committee, the Faculty Executive Committee and the Senate passed the proposed policy at each of their subsequent meetings without any significant alteration to the proposal. The President signed the policy with amazement at how quickly governance worked to produce it.

8. **Providing Status to Assessment through Governance:** Immediately after the policy was signed, the Assessment Subcommittee of the Educational Policies Committee was formed. The Subcommittee is chaired by the Coordinator of Assessment and is composed of some members from the Assessment Dinner Group as well as new members.

9. **Faculty Incentives for Assessment:** In order to provide the faculty with incentives for developing assessment strategies, a grant program was developed. The funds in the program are small $24,000 per year ($4,000 per grant). The funds can be spent on reassigned time for the faculty member, for travel to conferences to learn about discipline-based assessment, or for materials the department wishes to review. In the first year, three of the largest departments have received the grants. Each department will have an assessment process developed during the year. Using end of year monies, the Provost provided monies for two of the grant recipients to attend the Alverno College Assessment Conference. Both faculty members came back converted to the necessity of assessment and have become experts in the eyes of their respective department faculties. One of the faculty members, the vice president of the Academic Senate, uses his influence with governance to advance assessment in the university and has become the Coordinator of Assessment for his school.

10. **Incorporate Assessment in Important Faculty Initiatives:** As the university struggles with GE renewal, only one proposition has been unchallenged: assessment. Using the GE discussions about assessment as informal indicators, we are concluding that faculty and administrators have created a climate of acceptance for assessment on the campus.

11. **Incorporate Assessment in Important Administrative Initiatives:** In preparation for Strategic Planning, the Provost Council, spent the summer months developing an Academic Plan which includes statements about vision, values, and mission, as well as discussions about quality, centrality and assessment of the academic programs. During the discussion on assessment, which I led, the Council collaboratively developed agreements about the nature and use of assessment. During Fall semester, in our annual meetings with the deans, the Coordinator and I discovered more school funding for assessment as well as more administrative time being spent in academic councils discussing departmental assessment projects. The Coordinator and I have been invited to attend those school council meetings to extend the dialog about assessment.

12. **Inviting External Experts to Share Assessment Information with Campus Communities.** An earthquake ago, we had funds and time for inviting experts to campus. Small groups of faculty interested in assessment came to interact with the speakers. This year as we plan the visit of a national expert in assessment to the campus, we are scheduling open meetings, as well as meetings with the Provost's Council, the Associate Deans, the Educational Policies Committee, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, the Chairs, Department faculties who have adopted or want help in developing program assessment, advisors, the Instructional Development Committee, the GE Renewal Committee. As word gets out about the speaker, more groups want to hear him.

13. **Serendipitous Internal and External Forces for Assessment:** New administrators were appointed for the university. The President chaired a major higher education organization which is a strong proponent for assessment. The Provost came from a University that had published widely about its assessment program. Immediately after her appointment on the campus, the Provost was invited to join a committee in WASC to develop an assessment document. Our WASC midterm report became due, and we had to respond to the statements they made about the lack of a systematic approach to assessment. The California State University called for the initiation of assessment programs at the 23 campuses. Many of the organizations that accredit professional schools are calling for assessment data as proof to the public that the programs are effective.

CONCLUSION

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In this paper, I have presented the ways in which one campus has slowly incorporated assessment into its regular practices using opinion leaders, diffusion methods that appear to be working, and collaboration between faculty and administration. Trudy Banta's new book, ASSESSMENT IN PRACTICE: PUTTING PRINCIPALS TO WORK ON CAMPUSES (1996), provides campuses with a wide range of practical examples of how other universities and colleges have introduced assessment into their regular practices.

If there are any on your campuses who challenge why higher education is adopting assessment, Tom Angelo's (1995) definition describes well the nature and purpose of assessment.

> "Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. When it is embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education.(p. 7)"

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